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ABSTRACT

This study directly examined gender differences in the perception of the dimensional properties of causal attributions using a non-academic setting. Participants were 77 employees (31 males, 46 females) of four local financial institutions in Oklahoma. Questionnaires presented a success or failure scenario within either an affiliation (compliment or criticism from boss) or achievement (complete or failure to complete task) context. Each scenario included a causal attribution for the outcome (success or failure) depicted in the situation. The success or failure scenarios were presented nine times with different causal attributions representing variations along the causal dimensions. Causal attributions were personality, mood, stable or unstable effort, others' personality, others' mood, others' stable or unstable effort, and ability. Subjects completed the Causal Dimension Scale after each scenario. A three-way analysis of variance with a repeated measures design was used to evaluate whether males and females differed in their perceptions of the dimensional properties of the causes of success and failure. The results indicated no differences between women and men in terms of their perceptions of causality as measured by the Causal Dimension Scale. It appears that men and women, given the same situation and the same attribution for the outcome of that situation, perceive the causal nature of that attribution in the same way. (NB)

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Gender Differences In Perceptions of Attributions For Success and Failure In Financial Institutions

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Abstract

This study is a continuation of a program of research which examines gender differences in the perceptions of the dimensional properties of causal attributions. Participants in this study were employees of four local financial institutions in Norman, Oklahoma. A three way ANOVA with a repeated measures design was used to evaluate whether males and females differ in their perceptions of the dimensional properties of the causes of success and failure. While such gender differences have been studied in academic contexts with college students, this study will attempt to examine these effects in a non-academic sample. Possible applications of the study are in the areas of supervision, management, evaluation, and motivation of employees.

Gender Differences In Perceptions of Attributions For Success and Failure In Financial Institutions

Bernard Weiner and his colleagues proposed an attributional model of achievement motivation in the early 1970s (Weiner, Freize, Kukla, Rest, and Resenbaum, 1971). One line of research that grew out of this model was in the area of gender differences; numerous investigations have been carried out to determine whether differences in the way males and females perceive success and failure (causal attributions and causal dimensions) might account for differences in achievement behavior. Although initially this research suggested promising results, over time, studies have reported contradictory findings. However, two problems with this research suggest a continued examination of gender differences in this area is warranted. First, these studies measured causal dimensions indirectly; they assessed causal attributions and then made conclusions about causal dimensions based on the theoretical classification of causal attributions into the causal dimensions. Research has shown reliable and valid

measures of the causal attributions do not necessarily produce reliable and valid measures of the causal dimensions (Russell, McAuley, & Tauco, 1987). Second, this research has been primarily carried out in achievement contexts. Given Weiner's (1986) most recent statement of his model suggests the model is generalizable to all contexts, and Gilligan's (1982) assertions that men and women differ in their general orientation to the world (achievement versus affiliation), it seems extending this line of research into an affiliation context is warranted. Thus, the purpose of this study is to directly examine, via the Causal Dimension Scale (Russell, 1982), gender differences of the dimensional properties of causal attributions, using a non-academic setting.

Method

The subjects of this study are 77 employees (31 males, 46 females) of four local financial institutions in Norman, Oklahoma. Total employment for each bank ranges from 15 to 108 employees. Subjects ranged in age from 19 to 71 years, ranged in banking experience from 0 to 18 years, and 40 percent of the participating subjects were officers of the financial institution

where they were employed. Subjects volunteered to participate in the study and were randomly assigned to one of four conditions based upon the type of questionnaire received. Questionnaires presented a success or failure scenario within either an affiliation (compliment or criticism from boss) or achievement (complete or failure to complete task) context. Each scenario included a causal attribution for the outcome (success or failure) depicted in the situation. The success or failure scenarios were presented to the subject nine times with different causal attributions representing variations along the causal dimensions. Causal attributions were: personality; mood; stable or unstable effort; others' personality; others' mood; others' stable or unstable effort; and ability. Subjects completed the Causal Dimension Scale (Russell, 1982) after each scenario.

Results

A 2(male/female) x 2(success/failure outcome) x 9(attributions) repeated measures ANOVA was used to analyze the data. The nine causal attributions were the repeated measure, and Likert scale sums for three causal dimension subscales (locus of causality,

stability, and controllability) were the dependent variable. Three ANOVAs (each causal dimension subscale) were conducted separately for achievement (task) and affiliation (relationship) contexts.

No main effects or interactions for gender were found in either achievement or affiliation contexts under the causal dimension subscales. However, a main effect for attribution was found under both affiliation and achievement conditions for all subscales (locus of causality, controllability, and stability). A main effect for outcome was also found under the achievement condition for controllability and stability subscales. Attribution x outcome interactions were found under the affiliation condition for all three subscales, and for the achievement condition under the stability subscale. See Table I for statistical comparisons of the repeated measure ANOVAs.

Insert Table I here

A multiple comparison procedure by Ryan indicated significant differences in the comparison of means between success and failure groups for the locus of

causality, controllability, and stability causal dimension subscales as seen in Tables II, III, & IV.

Insert Tables II, III, IV here

Discussion

The results of this study indicated no differences between women and men in terms of their perceptions of causality as measured by the Causal Dimension Scale (Russell, 1982). Research on gender differences in attributions has been controversial. While early studies indicated consistent differences between men and women, over time, further studies failed to find differences. However, these studies measured perceptions of causality indirectly. In the present study, perceptions of causality were measured directly via the Causal Dimension Scale (Russell, 1982), yet this improvement in methodology did not appear to change the outcome of examining potential differences between men and women. Thus, it seems men and women, given the same situation and the same attribution for the outcome of that situation, perceive the causal nature of that attribution in the same way. It may be

gender differences in this area occur at the level of the selection of an attribution for a given outcome. In other words, when provided with an attribution, men and women may perceive that attribution in the same way, but when provided with a situation and no attribution, they may choose different attributions to explain the situation. Further, the attribution selected may vary as a function of outcome (success, failure) and context (achievement, affiliation). Thus, a more fruitful exploration in this area may be to present situations and require subjects to provide their own attribution for the outcome of the situation. Alternatively, it may be women and men do not differ in utilizing attributional processes. However, it seems important to consider the possibility that differences occur at other levels of the process (i.e. selection of the attribution, emotional reactions) before concluding no difference exist.

In other analyses, perceptions of causality varied as a function of attributions; subjects rated the attributions differently in terms of their locus of causality, stability, and controllability. This is consistent with Weiner's model (1986). Of particular

interest is the fact some ratings for the same attribution within each context differed as a function of outcome (success, failure). For example, under the achievement context, subjects perceived ability and unstable effort to be significantly more internal, stable, and controllable when presented for the successful outcome as opposed to the failure outcome. In the affiliation context, subjects perceived personality and stable effort to be more internal, controllable, and stable under a success scenario. Subjects perceived luck as more internal, controllable, and stable under failure scenarios. One possible explanation for these findings may be the operation of the fundamental attributional error. Specifically, the direction of these differences suggests for some of the theoretically internal attributions (ability, personality, effort), subjects were more likely to view them as internal, stable, and controllable under success. This may be self-serving, since it is more adaptive for a person to believe ability is an internal, stable, and controllable factor when that person succeeds. Thus, success in future situations would likely continue. Likewise, it is adaptive to

view ability as less internal, stable, and controllable when a person fails since it is less likely to operate in the future and produce more failures. For a theoretically external attribution (luck), subjects viewed the attribution as more internal, stable, and controllable under failure situations. Again, this can be viewed as self-serving since it is more adaptive to view an uncontrollable attribution as controllable under failure conditions.

To sum, no gender differences were found in this study. Differences in ratings of causality were found, which would be expected based on Weiner's model (1986). Differences in these ratings across success and failure seem to be consistent with a self-serving bias, although not all differences were significant. Further investigation is warranted to determine whether gender differences exist at other points in the attributional process.

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Table I
Statistical Comparisons

	Affiliation Context	Achievement Context
Locus Of Causality Subscale		
Main effect attribution:	$F_{(8,240)}=51.81$*	$F_{(8,296)}=32.13$*
Main effect outcome:	None	None
Attribution x outcome interaction:	$F_{(8,240)}= 3.54$*	None
Controllability Subscale		
Main effect attribution:	$F_{(8,240)}=31.88$*	$F_{(1, 36)}= 4.78$**
Main effect outcome:	None	$F_{(8,304)}=18.62$*
Attribution x outcome interaction:	$F_{(8,240)}= 5.79$*	None
Stability Subscale		
Main effect attribution:	$F_{(8,240)}=19.07$*	$F_{(8,288)}= 6.46$*
Main effect outcome:	None	$F_{(1, 36)}=22.87$*
Attribution x outcome interaction:	$F_{(8,240)}= 4.03$**	$F_{(8,288)}= 5.31$*

* indicates $p<.01$
**indicates $p<.05$

Table II
Mean Comparisons for Locus of Causality Subscale

Affiliation

Repeated Measure Condition	Success Group Means	Failure Group Means
Luck*	8.33	13.74
Mood	22.13	21.74
Other's Mood	13.20	10.21
Other's Personality	9.40	10.10
Other's Stable Effort	12.13	9.37
Other's Unstable Effort	14.60	12.84
Personality*	24.27	21.10
Stable Effort*	22.60	19.16
Unstable Effort	22.73	19.89

Achievement

Repeated Measure Condition	Success Group Means	Failure Group Means
Ability*	24.86	20.39
Luck	12.83	14.56
Mood	23.26	21.61
Other's Mood	14.30	11.11
Other's Stable Effort	13.26	11.72
Other's Unstable Effort	13.30	12.06
Stable Effort	22.22	21.72
Task Difficulty	16.00	15.00
Unstable Effort*	24.04	21.50

* indicates statistically different at .05 level

Table III
Mean Comparisons for Controllability Subscale

Affiliation

Repeated Measure Condition	Success Group Means	Failure Group Means
Luck*	6.80	12.26
Mood	20.47	19.63
Other's Mood	14.53	14.84
Other's Personality	13.93	15.16
Other's Stable Effort	16.00	15.26
Other's Unstable Effort*	20.67	17.37
Personality*	23.27	18.05
Stable Effort*	23.20	18.68
Unstable Effort	21.60	19.58

Achievement

Repeated Measure Condition	Success Group Means	Failure Group Means
Ability*	24.00	16.89
Luck	11.87	12.16
Mood	20.66	18.21
Other's Mood	17.87	17.53
Other's Stable Effort	21.22	19.05
Other's Unstable Effort	20.48	18.47
Stable Effort*	22.61	19.58
Task Difficulty	16.70	15.10
Unstable Effort*	23.22	19.89

* indicates statistically different at .05 level

Table IV
Mean Comparisons for Stability Subscale

Affiliation

Repeated Measure Condition	Success Group Means	Failure Group Means
Luck*	5.53	9.05
Mood*	10.06	6.84
Other's Mood	9.40	7.26
Other's Personality	15.13	14.42
Other's Stable Effort	13.46	12.58
Other's Unstable Effort	10.80	11.53
Personality*	19.47	14.21
Stable Effort*	17.07	11.74
Unstable Effort*	13.53	9.21

Achievement

Repeated Measure Condition	Success Group Means	Failure Group Means
Ability*	19.39	9.29
Luck	9.52	8.29
Mood*	12.26	7.94
Other's Mood*	10.65	7.47
Other's Stable Effort*	14.13	10.82
Other's Unstable Effort*	11.83	9.00
Stable Effort*	17.07	8.47
Task Difficulty	13.91	11.41
Unstable Effort*	13.60	7.65

* indicates statistically different at .05 level

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